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DEFINING AND DEFENDING
THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The U.S. National Interest in the Middle East

In recent years American foreign policy makers, and the American public in general, have had to cope with rapidly occurring changes in the Middle East, which have had sweeping effects on the international political and economic order. As a result of events such as the formation and rise to power of OPEC in the 1960's and '70's, the overthrow of the Shah of Ira in 1979 and the subsequent American hostage ordeal, and the failed U.S. "peace keeping" mission in Lebanon which resulted in the deaths of over 200 U.S. marines in 1983, it has become increasingly clear that the United States is unable to control developments in the region, even in areas of traditional influence. While it may be that this decline in influence was inevitable, the thesis to be argued here is that many of the "unfavorable" changes in the Middle East were the product of an often incoherent and misguided U.S. foreign policy toward the region.

Although the discussion to follow will briefly examine relevant past events, its primary purpose is to look ahead. In order to better understand U.S. objectives in the region, and to discover the methods by which these objectives can be more fully attained, this discussion will attempt to analyze three important topics. First, what U.S. national interests in the region are, as properly defined. Second, the current visible

and hidden threats to U.S. national interests in the Middle East. And third, the methods which the United States can and should use to better adapt its policy to events in the Middle East of the present and future.

Before beginning to delve into the complexities of the discussion to follow, it seems that one basic point requires clarification, and that is the meaning of the term the Middle East. As it turns out, merely deciding which nations make up the Middle East is no easy task, and is a topic of some dispute. Therefore, I have chosen to delineate the region in a manner which best suits the issues to be discussed, namely the region's oil wealth, Islamic fundamentalism, Soviet involvement in the region, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, for the purposes of the discussion to follow the Middle East refers to the nations of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, North Yemen, The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), Libya, and the Sudan.[1] This geographical limitation is in no way intended to suggest that events in other nations do not affect the region defined above, nor that this is the "correct" delineation of the Middle East in terms of the nations which are included, or excluded from it. It is merely provided for the noble purposes of clarity and understanding, and will act as a helpful boundary for this discourse. With this in mind, our attention shifts to

one of the primary activities in foreign policy circles: the determination of U.S. national interests in the Middle East.

The phrase "to protect the national interest" has been used repeatedly in the 20th Century to justify the actions of American presidents and other world leaders. Although it may be that the term "national interest" has become a successful legitimizing agent over time, it seems that the term's overuse has left its meaning unclear, and has weakened its power as an explanatory tool. The primary problem which arises from the overuse and misuse of the term "national interest" is that the relatively obvious differences among the numerous concerns of a nation's foreign policy are clouded. There is a need to realize that "certain interests must be defended at all costs; others should be safeguarded under particular circumstances; and certain others, although desirable, can almost never be defended."[2] This need is perhaps best satisfied through the establishment of an equivalent to Maslow's "Hierarchy of Human Needs" adapted to the realm of foreign policy. Similar to the human need to first satisfy food and shelter requirements before concentrating on "higher" desires, there is a need for a nation's foreign policy to give primary attention to certain interests which are inexorably linked to that nation's future continued existence as a sovereign state. It is these interests, which must be protected at whatever cost, that can be justifiably termed "national interests."

While many authors have attempted to establish the qualifying characteristics of a "national interest," the definition set out by Hans Morgenthau seems to fit most adeptly to the character of the discussion above. In his book, Politics Among Nations, Morgenthau states that, "The national interest of a peace-loving nation can only be defined in terms of national security, and national security must be defined as integrity of the national territory and of its institutions."[3] Although U.S. national interests in the Middle East may appear to be non-existent given the fact that the United States in no way even comes close to bordering the region; in the interdependent world of the 1980's, it seems clear that the integrity of at least one of the United States' institutions is at stake there.

When one more closely examines Morgenthau's definition and applies it to U.S. foreign policy with regard to the Middle East, the most obvious U.S. national interest in the region seems to lie in the realm of economics. Clearly, one of the primary institutions of any nation-state is its economy, due to the fact that economic power can and often has been translated into military and/or national power which in turn can be used to defend the nation's territory and its other institutions. As a result, each nation has a strong desire to maintain the viability of its own economy. In the late 20th Century, however, the desire to maintain a strong national economy has been expanded to include an interest in the viability of the

world economy. This is primarily true for the "Western" nations who are each important participants in the capitalist system a system which depends on an active exchange of goods and services to maintain its strength. The interest in maintaining the economies of one's trading partners became most pronounced during the worldwide recessions of the early 1970's and 80's. During this period, declining world oil production and accompanying price hikes affected not only highly dependent Western Europe and Japan, but also produced indirect turmoil for other economies which were far less in need of foreign sources of oil. As a result of these experiences it became clear that the national economic interests of the United States could no longer be defined in a vacuum. Thus, when one asks the question: What are U.S. national economic interests in the Middle East, one is referring to the common economic interests of the entire Western World, and any additional economic interests which may be solely of concern to the United States.

When one considers the fact that almost 60% of the world's proven oil reserves are located in the Middle East, and that 13% of the remaining total is located behind the "Iron Curtain", the economic importance of the region to the United States and the West becomes readily apparent.[4] Furthermore, while the level of U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil imports has fluctuated in recent years, it seems that over the long term the U.S. "national interest" in maintaining secure and steady access to

the region's oil resources will remain primary. This becomes particularly clear when one examines the general trends in U.S. patterns of oil consumption during the 1970's and 80's, and the current market conditions for oil in the United States and the world.

The dangers associated with dependence on insecure sources of oil became evident in the early 1970's when, in response to renewed Arab-Israeli fighting, OPEC declared that it would unilaterally quadruple the price of its crude oil. In fact, following the outbreak of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the price of crude oil rose from $3 per barrel in September to almost $12 per barrel by December; the result of an Arab oil embargo which led to a net decline in world oil production of 4.4 million barrels per day.[5] The economic conditions at the time of the Arab oil embargo also gave the "oil weapon" a little extra force. Rapidly growing demand coupled with a decrease in the supply of oil put the Western market economies in a weak bargaining position concerning the price increases. While the oil shock was at the outset most severe in Western Europe and Japan, the economic effects of the price increases were soon global in nature.

In response to this first energy crisis, a conference was convened in Washington in February 1974 to unite the Western alliance behind a policy of countering the newly discovered power of the oil producers. Prior to the conference, Western

Europe and Japan had been pursuing independent courses of action directed toward the striking of bilateral deals which would alleviate the pressures associated with having an uncertain oil supply. Their independent courses proved to be unsuccessful, however, as a wild scramble for oil on the world market ensued and consumer insecurity reached frantic heights. In response to the inability of the individual Western nations to effectively deal with an increasingly unstable environment, the Western alliance agreed at the Washington conference to form an International Energy Agency (IEA), and a standby emergency oil sharing program. These moves helped to placate the acute concerns of Western Europe and Japan, as did the long-term commitment of the IEA's member nations to begin efforts at conservation, stockpiling, and research and development of alternative sources of energy.[6] In the period from 1973 to '78, the Western Europeans and Japanese utilized conservation and pricing policies to help decrease their extreme energy vulnerabilities. These policies, in conjunction with slower economic growth, led to a 2.3 percent decline in their total oil requirements over the period.[7]

In the United States, the public remained highly skeptical about the genuineness of the supposed oil scarcity. And, contrary to the trend in Western Europe and Japan, U.S. imports out of the world oil market increased by 28.5 percent over the same period of 1973-78.[8] The failure of the United States to

undertake effective conservation policies and to increase utilization of its own indigenous supply of oil not only increased U.S. dependence on foreign sources of oil, but also heightened resentment in the rest of the Western world. These nations undoubtedly viewed U.S. competition for a larger share of the international oil supply as a threat to their already limited ability to withstand any future supply shocks. Unfortunately, in late 1978, the concerns of Western Europe and Japan proved to be well warranted.

By the end of 1977 U.S. oil import dependence had reached a new peak with foreign oil providing for 48 percent of consumption.[9] World oil supplies were only barely adequate, creating a situation in which even a minor decrease in the supply of oil would bring with it a pronounced change in price. The catalyst for just such a change soon appeared as the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah of Iran paved the way for a second major world oil crisis. A component of the successful plan to overthrow the Shah was the halting of all exports of Iranian oil by oil workers sympathetic to the cause, leaving behind a 5.4 million barrels a day gap between world oil demand and supply.[10] This gap proved to be more than enough to create a frenzy in the world oil market and to send prices skyrocketing. Because of efforts by other OPEC members (primarily Saudi Arabia) the initial loss of Iranian oil exports was soon partially offset by increases in production elsewhere,

and by a gradual return to production in Iran itself. By the middle of 1980 the market appeared as though it had stabilized somewhat.

This brief "stable" period was soon destroyed by a second drop in total OPEC oil production which accompanied the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September of 1980. The result was a 10 percent decline in world oil exports and a hike in the market price to a new $41 a barrel ceiling by December of 1980. The shocks produced by this second oil crisis caused drastic changes in the world oil market. The demand for oil fell as the world economy headed for a serious recession, and as inflation began to take command over the Western world. The incentives for increased production of indigenous oil were now strong enough to encourage a rise in the non-OPEC share of the market. Furthermore, conservation efforts in the United States were taken up with a great deal more seriousness as a result of government incentive programs and regulation. As a result of changes such as these, world demand for oil fell from almost 51 million barrels of oil per day in 1979 to less than 44 million barrels of oil per day by 1983.[12]

Although the decline in demand for world oil and the accompanying price cuts have contributed greatly to the rejuvenation of the economies of the Western alliance, many analysts are currently advising that the string of recent oil shocks is far from over. In fact, current conditions may be the precursor of an untold disaster which lies ahead. Most

recently, a study conducted by the National Petroleum Council at the request of Energy Secretary John S. Harrington found that, "...by 1995 as much as 60 percent of the nation's oil needs would have to be supplied from foreign sources, up from 27 percent in 1985." The study also contends that by the early 1990's the members of OPEC will, "...probably be exerting greater control over the world oil market than they did in the 1970's."[13] The chief concern currently is over declining domestic production in the United States, which fell by about 9 percent between February and December of 1986, and is estimated to fall by an additional 300,000 to 500,000 barrels per day during 1987.[14] This decline is not only producing short-term trouble for Texas, but it is also likely to be a long-term threat to U.S. national security. This becomes particularly evident when one examines the realities of domestic oil production under current market conditions. Unprofitable wells are being "capped" in order to halt production. Since the costs of redrilling a marginal well are extremely high, the oil left behind will undoubtedly remain in the ground until prices rise to currently unimaginable levels. Furthermore, the redrilling of these marginal, yet vitally important, wells takes time, time which may be extremely costly to U.S. national security during an oil crisis of the proportions envisioned by the National Petroleum Council.

Although much of the attention of these analysts seems to

focus on the potential resurgence of OPEC in the 1990's, the preceding overview of recent world oil market history suggests that the exercise of OPEC's potential power has required a catalyst exterior to itself. In 1973, the catalyst was a renewed Arab-Israeli conflict; and, in 1979-80, the catalysts were the revolutionary overthrow of the pro-Western Shah of Iran and the outbreak of a destructive war between Iran and Iraq. All of which suggests that the protection of the U.S. national interest in the Middle East will require careful consideration of threats more volatile and numerous than the future plans of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Up to this point, this discussion of U.S. national interests in the Middle East has centered on only one national interest, the need to maintain a steady supply of oil coming from the Middle East headed for the Western World. The reason for this is that after careful consideration, this concern is the only one of several traditional concerns of U.S. foreign policy makers which closely fits into the framework of the "national interest", as properly defined previously. For reasons to be taken up shortly, the remaining traditional concerns: the security of Israel, the threat of Soviet expansion into the region, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, are at the most quasi-national interests and, at the least, non-interests. So, as to further clarify the distinction which is intended, it seems helpful to categorize all of the feasible components of U.S

foreign policy toward the Middle East under three headings. The first category is composed of the "hub concerns." These concerns fulfill Morgenthau's criteria of a national interest by being vital to the integrity of a nation's territory, or of its most important institutions. The second category is made up of what will be referred to as "spoke concerns." These concerns are the result of world conditions, and are related to all potentially realistic threats to the hub concerns. The individual spoke concerns may change over time; however, only as quickly as all opportunities for a successful attack on the hub are eliminated. The third and final category contains the instruments or methods which can be used to protect the hub, otherwise known as the national interest. These so-called "instrument concerns" may include nations which can aid in the protection of an ally's national interest, or they may be components of a nation's armed forces, etc. This final category is the most apt to change in character over time or from situation to situation.

While the preceding discussion has sought to establish the extremely vital nature of the U.S. national interest in maintaining a steady flow of oil to the Western industrial economies, the remainder of this discourse paper on the three spoke concerns of the United States in the Middle East of the 1980's. They are a desire to limit the threat posed to stability in the region by Islamic fundamentalism; a need to

contain Soviet activity in the Middle East; and a drive to squelch the inflammatory nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. All of which pose long-term challenges for a foreign policy whose primary purpose is the protection of Western access to the region's oil. The final portion of this study will center on the threat posed by an improperly conceived American foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Since the early 1970's up to the present, a great deal of public attention has been focused on three recurring events in the Middle East: hostage taking, internal violence directed at a reigning leader, and the numerous acts of "terrorism." Many recent disturbances of these types can be linked to the rise to power of Islamic fundamentalists in Iran, which has acted as a spark for fiery events throughout the region. Although fundamentalism has not, as of yet, turned into a blazing inferno throughout the region, there have been periodic flareups in several nations which are vital to the U.S. national interest in the region. Furthermore, in several nations of the Middle East conditions may be favorable for an effective fundamentalist campaign sometime in the near future. While any attempt to predict the future is purely speculative, a good foreign policy geared toward the effective protection of vital national interests must create contingency plans based on all feasible occurrences. As a result, this section will attempt to examine the patterns of recent Islamic disturbances, which signals a need to re-examine U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East.

In order to better understand the conditions under which the threat of Islamic fundamentalism may be a danger to Western access to a secure and steady supply of oil, a brief examination of certain features of Islam seems to be required. As pointed

out by Daniel Pipes, the need to understand Islam has increased given its social and political importance in the Middle East of the 1980's.

> Proposals for solving the Arab-Israel conflict must consider the special Islamic concern for the control of territory. American or Soviet negotiators seeking military bases must take into account vehement Islamic sensibilities against the presence of non-Muslim troops...Even business interests need to watch Islam, for many key oil exporting states entertain powerful sentiments of grievance and resentment against the Christian West.[1]

Islam, like many of the world's other religions, has been prone to the effects of divisiveness, which have limited its ability to act as a powerful, unified force throughout the region. While there are many small divisions within the Islamic faith, the primary split is that between the Sunni and the Shi'a Muslims. The much larger group of Sunni Muslims do not provide for any formal process of reinterpretation of the Sharia, which is Muslim law as derived from the Qur'an. Consequently, the Sunnis have had no need for religious leaders to act as interpreters of the faith; and as a result of this lack of an institutionalized religious hierarchy, the Sunnis have been unlikely to mobilize toward change. The Shi'a Muslims, on the other hand, do have a system of religious interpretation called ijtihad through which reinterpretations of the Sharia are handed down by a religious scholar on an issue of concern to the people.[2] The most influential of these scholars are the ayatollahs and the grand ayatollahs, the most prominent of which

is the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Given the Shi'ite belief that the grand ayatollahs are, "literally the manifestation of God on earth", it is not hard to understand how the masses in Iran were eventually mobilized away from modernization and back to Islam.[3] The distinction made between the Shi'a and Sunni Muslims is not intended to suggest that either group is less serious about obedience to their faith as they see it. However, it does seem to suggest that prior to the successful Iranian revolution active dissent was more likely to come from the more hierarchically organized Shi'ite groups than from the more individualistic, "traditional" Sunnis. Currently, however, for reasons to be examined later, the Sunnis may be just as prone to dissent, especially in those Middle Eastern nations hardest hit by a recent decline in national income.

One lesson that should have been learned as a result of the revolution in Iran is that modernization, or interaction with the West, is not likely to gain the favor of the public, nor the religious sector in the Middle East, unless the change is gradual, controlled, and widely beneficial. The changes in Iran clearly did not obey these instructions, especially during the latter years of the Shah's rule. William Forbis points to several factors which contributed to the fall of the Shah of Iran. First, rapidly rising oil income was used to fuel rapid industrialization which brought with it inflation, rising expectations, and a move by thousands of agricultural laborers

to the cities. Second, the Shah of Iran alienated the merchants, not only by arresting them for "profiteering", but also by allowing the establishment of Western style banks which eliminated the demand for the bazaari's traditional moneylending business. And third, the Shah proved to be unable to satisfy the tide of rising expectations, as agricultural production declined while appetites rose, and as the population in the highly concentrated cities grew while the supply of jobs remained constant.[4] It was in the context of disturbing social changes such as these that the fundamentalist revolution under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini took hold.

The change from a "secular" government to an Islamic one was viewed with hope by many observers within Iran, as well as outside of it. For those inside of Iran who had been alienated by the changes which had accompanied modernization, and angered by the disparate wealth of the government's leaders, the return to Islamic values provided a "renewed sense of confidence and direction."[5] Furthermore, since the basis of this change was religious, it was widely supported, despite the fact that the return to Islamic doctrine brought with it disturbing social changes whose reach was in some instances even more pervasive than those which accompanied modernization. One of the big attractions of the fundamentalist Shi'a doctrine is the call for redistribution of wealth on more equitable terms. The promises of the Islamic leadership in revolutionary Iran, that a return

to traditional values will bring with it greater economic equality, has continued to fuel dissent by the traditionally impoverished minority Shi'ites, and by many impoverished and/or extremist Sunnis throughout the region. It may be that the ability of the Islamic leader in Iran to find a sympathetic audience is exactly what makes revolutionary Iran a major threat to stability and to the U.S. national interest in the Middle East. This is especially true if the promise of redistribution of the region's wealth can be used to mobilize the masses for less than noble purposes.

The first of many incidents which occurred in the wake of the Iranian revolution and suggested the potentially destructive power of the fundamentalist movement was the November 1979 takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Sunni extremists. The takeover was shocking, not only because it was propagated by Sunni Muslims who are historically obedient to the established order, but also because it occurred inside of Saudi Arabia.[6] While Saudi troops fought to regain control of the holiest shrine of Islam, riots broke out in the eastern section of the country led by Shi'ite fundamentalists who chose to defy the Saudi government's ban on the self-flaggelation demonstrations associated with the Shi'a holy festival of Ashura.[7] Although these uprisings were indeed embarrassing moments for the government of Saudi Arabia, it does not seem that the government was ever in danger of being overthrown by the minority of Saudi

Arabian Shi'ite and Sunni fundamentalists and/or radicals who took part in them. However, this does not mean that the Saudi government has no reason to be genuinely concerned about the future activities of the fundamentalists in their nation and in the region.

A great deal of the Saudi government's concern about the fundamentalists is the result of an ideological rift that exists between the Shi'ite ruled theocracy in Iran and the Sunni ruled monarchy in Saudi Arabia. The crucial difference of opinion is over the issue of whether the leader of an Islamic nation who is not a member of the clergy can be considered legitimate. Because the Shi'ite ruled Iran considers the religious leadership to be the only legitimate rulers, it is not surprising that the Saudi family, which retains control over political, military and bureaucratic power, has come under heated Iranian verbal attack. The Saudi ruling family has also come under attack for its support of Iraq in the war, and for its increasingly visible acceptance of peaceful relations with the United States, the "Great Satan."

Iranian government "revolutionary" activities in the region have not been limited to mere words either. In fact, it appears that Ayatollah Montazeri, the most likely successor to the Ayatollah Khomeini, has been a strong advocate of a drive to export the Iranian revolution, and has "succeeded in channeling money, weapons and other support for various Islamic

movements."[8] This effort has continued despite shrunken oil revenue and the severe economic drain of the Iran-Iraq War, signalling the importance of a desire to export the revolution's principles for Iran's religious leadership. The results of the efforts to export the revolution have been both tangible and psychological in nature. On the tangible side, there was the coup attempt directed at the government of Bahrain, carried out by a group of Shi'a Muslims in December of 1981. Those apprehended following the thwarted coup attempt were alleged to be members of the Teheran based Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain.[9] A great deal of evidence was discovered that implied Iranian involvement, prompting one author to conclude that, "For Iran, despite all the rhetoric about exporting the revolution, no move had ever before been as bold or as obvious as the coup attempt."[10] In other instances, Iranian involvement in Shi'a Muslim attacks or uprisings seems to be less direct, and yet important. For example, the bombings of the U.S. marine compound and the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983-84 were apparently conducted by members of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad. Although direct involvement by Iran in the planning of these attacks is doubtful, there does seem to be sketchy evidence that some of the members of this group had acquired their terrorist "skills" in Iranian sponsored training camps.[11]

Psychologically speaking, the fear of attack or uprising has been implanted in the minds of the leaders of the region and in

the minds of the leaders of nations which might choose to become involved in the region, and has produced certain changes desired by the fundamentalists and the leaders in Iran. In Saudi Arabia, following the violence of 1979, the government began to more strictly enforce the Islamic code of law in order to dispel criticism from the fundamentalists. In 1981, in response to concern about the Iran-Iraq war and the inflammatory potential of the Iranian revolution in their countries, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined together to form the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC).[12] And, in February of 1984, the Marines were withdrawn from Lebanon and "redeployed" to ships offshore.

To the extent that Islamic fundamentalism has produced attitude changes within the nations of the Middle East, the U.S. position in the region in terms of influence over events has declined. For the United States, the "loss" of Iran was tragic, not only because Iran had been an instrument which could be mobilized to protect the U.S. national interest, but also because the fall of the Shah of Iran called into question the prestige of the U.S. as an ally. Some of the mistakes which led to this "loss" will be discussed later; however, for now let it suffice to say that revolutionary Iran's promotion of an anti-Western ideology is proceeding at great cost to the United States. These costs have manifested themselves in terms of loss of human life, instability in friendly Arab nations, and in an

increasingly standoffish attitude in the region toward the U.S., often reaching the level of outright hatred. All of these costs are signs of a larger instability which may soon gravely threaten the U.S. national interest in the Middle East, which is Western access to the region's oil supply.

This larger threat of Islamic fundamentalism to the Western economic system, through the endangerment of secure access to oil, may manifest itself in four ways. The first potential danger rests in the possibility of indigenous fundamentalists staging destructive attacks on the oil production facilities in their country with the intent of undermining the power of their nation's leaders. This type of attack, although unsuccessful, was attempted in Kuwait in December of 1983. Along with five other bombings perpetrated on the same day, including one at the American embassy in Kuwait, a bombing was attempted at the Shuaiba Petrochemical Plant. Fortunately, only a small proportion of the explosives wired to go off actually did, and a major catastrophe was averted.[13] A successful attack of this type on an oil production or storage center would leave the government with a fire which might burn for months and even years, while acting as a symbol of the leader's weakness or inability to maintain the loyalty of his people. Undoubtedly, it would also lead to a decline in oil production, and might also contribute to greater regional instability.

The second way in which Islamic fundamentalism might

jeopardize Western Access to Middle Eastern oil involves direct attacks on leaders, who are viewed as religiously impure, corrupt, "pro-U.S.", or "moderate", by indigenous groups. These attacks may include massive protest or revolt as in Iran, coup attempts as in Bahrain in 1981, or outright assassination as in the case of Egypt's Anwar Sadat in 1981. Such attacks can be extremely destabilizing, leading to radical and uncontrollable changes which may very quickly transform a nation or the entire region.

A third way in which Islamic fundamentalists may undermine the security of the U.S. national interest in the Middle East is by exporting the revolutionary ideas and changes which have developed in their own nations to other nations in the region. The agents of this exportation of ideas may be workers who move across national lines to find work, Muslim pilgrims making the trek to Mecca, or individuals who travel to other nations in the Middle East as students or tourists. Current economic conditions may also cause many who would not have been attentive to these agents if the oil boom had continued to become receptive to Islamic fundamentalist doctrine, making this method of subtle subversion that much more effective. The Iranian government has also developed a direct method aimed at exporting its revolutionary ideas, involving the beaming of extensive radio and television programming throughout the Gulf. The programming schedule includes Islamic fundamentalist messages,

attacks on the ruling monarchies, and news about the "successful" war effort against Iraq.[14]

The final way in which Islamic fundamentalists may threaten secure access by the West to the region's oil supply is by waging a "war of terrorism" against other nations in the region and their leaders. This could remain at the level of mere sponsorship of individuals who are prepared to carry out the will of Allah as handed down by the religious leaders; it could entail direct attacks on the oil production facilities or oil supertankers of another nation; or it could develop into an all-out military confrontation.

Just how threatening each of these methods is to regional stability and to the U.S. national interest relative to the others is unclear. However, it should be clear by now that Islamic fundamentalism does have a large potential power, as a result of the existence of a fairly substantial receptive audience throughout the region. This is particularly true in the nations with large Shi'ite Muslim populations in terms of percent of the total population, such as Bahrain - 70 percent, North Yemen - 50 percent, and Kuwait - 24 percent.[15] Islamic fundamentalist doctrine is also finding a receptive audience among the Sunnis in countries whose leaders are politically unpopular or in nations with currently poor economic conditions, as in the cases of Egypt and North Yemen. Here, the appeal of the portion of the doctrine which calls for greater economic

equality and a return to traditional values and customs is particularly strong.

The most unpleasant prospect that could be envisioned for the Middle East in the near future would be the emergence of a victorious Revolutionary Iran from the lengthy Iran-Iraq War, gearing up to take on its other major enemy in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia. Although Iran denies having any territorial designs on Saudi Arabia, it is clear from the Iranian government's rhetoric that the religious leadership would like nothing better than to affect a change in the leadership of Saudi Arabia, possibly through the use of violent means. And, since it appears that no feasible amount of military build-up would put Saudi Arabia on an equal footing with Iran or Iraq, its only real option is to "use its early warning system and interceptor aircraft to delay an enemy attack until help arrives from the outside."[16] The threat of attack is far greater still where the smaller, sparsely populated countries of Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait are concerned. All of them are important oil producers in their own right, and all border the nation which commands the world's primary remaining oil reservoir, Saudi Arabia. Stability in these nations is thus extremely important, as is the security of Saudi Arabia's northern border with Iraq and its southern border with North and South Yemen. As stressed earlier, if dependence on Middle Eastern oil increases worldwide, as it is expected to, any

fundamental cutback in supply, whether the result of the effects of a war or a limited attack on oil production facilities, could bring with it another worldwide recession and could throw the Western market economy into a state of utter chaos.

In order for the United States to have a foreign policy which, at the least, does not exacerbate the Islamic fundamentalist problem in the Middle East, it should try to follow three "rules of thumb." First, U.S. foreign policy should concentrate on being sensitive to the actual and potential threat which fundamentalist doctrine and revolutionary Iran present to regional stability and the U.S. national interest in the region. Second, this sensitivity, and the knowledge gained from it, should be applied in the analysis of the foreign policies of nations in the area. Such application will undoubtedly yield more nearly correct answers to such questions as why countries such as Egypt, Kuwait, Oman or Saudi Arabia are wary of certain kinds of interaction with the United States at this point in time. And third, U.S. foreign policy should be geared toward rectifying the errors of the past which, although not the sole cause of instability in the region, have greatly heightened the degree of animosity toward the United States in the Middle East.

With the U.S. national interest and the "spoke" concern of Islamic fundamentalism firmly in mind, our attention shifts once again to a second "spoke" concern (or realistic threat to the

"hub"), which is the destabilizing nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and of the U.S. stance with regard to that conflict. Both of which have greatly contributed to the general inability of the United States to eliminate the threats to its national interest presented by Islamic fundamentalism, Soviet involvement in the region, and the Arab-Israeli conflict itself.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Because the Arab-Israeli conflict has demonstrated its potential for undermining regional and global stability, as well as the security of the West's access to Arab oil, there have been some repeated efforts undertaken in the hope of resolving it. These efforts have been largely unsuccessful, however, as a result of the uncompromising positions taken by each side on one point or another and the general animosity which has developed between the parties to the conflict over the years. Although the costs which have accrued to the United States as a result of the continuation of this conflict are not as direct as those imposed on Israel and the Arab world, these costs are substantial enough to warrant intense effort on the part of the U.S. to peacefully secure a stable, equitable settlement. Sadly, however, it seems that because of the so-called "special relationship" between the United States and Israel, the U.S.' credibility as a potential mediator of the conflict has come under increasing attack. Furthermore, the costs of maintaining this "special relationship" in its present form in a hostile environment have continued to accrue on the U.S. side of the ledger. It is these costs, which present a growing threat to the U.S. national interest in the Middle East, that form the framework of this portion of our discussion.

While this entire treatise adopts a relatively restricted

view of the U.S. national interest in the Middle East, the much broader view taken by many government officials and analysts concludes that one of the several "U.S. national interests" in the region is the security of Israel. Although it may be that, as former President Richard Nixon stated in 1981, "With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, one premise from which United States policy must proceed is our strong moral commitment to the preservation of the state of Israel."[1] It is not so clear that this legitimate concern for the security of Israel should be allowed to pre-empt the national interest of the U.S. set out in the preceding pages. To a considerable extent, however, whether by unconscious error or by conscious policy formulation, this is exactly what has occurred to the long-term detriment of the true U.S. national interest.

The title of "spoke" concern seems to fit well with the U.S. desire to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, given the costs associated with continuing the conflict in a manner such that regional stability, U.S. credibility, and consequently, the U.S. national interest are perpetually at risk. These costs became increasingly pronounced in the period following the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, during which American foreign policy toward the Middle East became more heavily founded on the premise that the United States had a primary interest in maintaining the "security" of Israel. In the wake of the Israeli victory in the '67 War, American relations with even the most moderate Arab

nations deteriorated under a tide of anti-American sentiment that developed from a basically correct perception in the Arab world that the U.S. was quickly becoming pro-Israel, rather than choosing to remain an objective observer of the conflict.[2] Furthermore, as the United States put greater emphasis on its "special relationship" with Israel, "Soviet influence in the Middle East increased vastly, as Moscow moved to rebuild the militaries of Syria and Egypt, to support the PLO, and to befriend the Arabs in the wake of their defeat";[3] this topic will be taken up in greater depth in the section to follow the present one.

Possibly as a result of a preoccupation with the Vietnam War effort, the negative repercussions of the swing toward a pro-Israel position received little attention, while the U.S. relationship with Israel continued to grow stronger. In fact, in 1971, as highly visible evidence of this policy change, American aid to Israel was increased by 5 times the largest amount given previously, for a total of $600.8 million.[4] The justification for this sizable increase was found in an application of the Nixon Doctrine, which stated that the United States would provide military and economic assistance to those nations whose freedom had come under attack so that they could provide for their own defense.[5] The assumption underlying this doctrine was that if given the proper amount of military and economic assistance, countries such as Israel and Iran would

have sufficient strength to deter aggression against themselves, while acting as a surrogate of the United States to maintain regional stability and to protect Western access to the region's oil supply.

The Egyptian-Syrian surprise attack on Israel in October of 1973, and the Arab oil embargo which soon followed were enough to bring the Nixon doctrine under question. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war quickly renewed U.S. attention to the Middle East. It also led to a realization that U.S. support for Israel and the perception of a strong Israeli military were not sufficient to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, nor to insure regional stability.[6] Rather, a long-term, diplomatic solution was required to create a more peaceful environment. A second realization grew out of the imposition of the Arab oil embargo which caused economic dislocations in the U.S., Western Europe, and Japan. According to one recent study, the oil shock, whether real or merely psychological, pushed the U.S. economy into a recession, led to a 2 percent rise in the unemployment rate, a 3 percent rise in the inflation rate, and caused a 3.5 percent drop in the value of goods and services produced.[7]

These effects of the October War, while not enough to bring about a radical change in the U.S. attitude regarding its "special relationship" with Israel, did bring U.S. foreign policy makers to the conclusion that the costs of leaving the Arab-Israeli conflict unresolved were extremely high, and posed

grave dangers to the U.S. national interest. And consequently, more effort would need to be devoted to the search for a long lasting peace. Such an attitude was espoused in a 1975 Brookings Institution report entitled Toward Peace in the Middle East. The report states that, "The United States, by its intensive participation in negotiations since the 1973 war,...has demonstrated that it recognizes its own vital interest in an early end to conflict and enduring peace." Subsequently, the report cites five broadly defined interests of the United States which are at stake in the region: a desire to limit the danger associated with future wars which may completely uproot regional and global peace, a desire to maintain friendly relations with Israel and the Arab world, a "strong interest in the unimpeded flow of Middle Eastern oil...", an interest in open trade relations with the entire region, and an interest in the promotion of greater political and economic stability.[8]

The attitudes conveyed by the Brookings report soon became the policy of the Carter administration, as two of the reports' contributing authors, Zbigniew Brzezinski and William Quandt, went on to become members of President Carter's staff. President Carter approached the enduring conflict in the Middle East with personal zeal, stressing the need to consider not only a traditional commitment to the security of Israel, but also an urgent need to "resolve the underlying problems, rather than see

continued violence which threatened to spread beyond the Middle East and even to involve the superpowers."[9] It was clear from the outset, however, that President Carter's, or any future president's, ability to pursue a mediator role in the Middle East would be greatly constrained by domestic political factors and the actions or policies of his predecessors; and, unfortunately, so would his ability to successfully protect the United States' true national interest. As pointed out by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance,

> Because of the intimate American association with Israel in previous Middle East peace efforts, for Carter to adopt an activist balanced policy carried a significant political risk. He could be seen both at ho and in Israel as tilting toward the Arabs and pressu ng Israel to make dangerous territorial concessions."[10]

The primary domestic political factor with which an American president must deal is the so-called Israel lobby, whose operating arms include the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. Although the power of the Israel lobby varies from issue to issue, it is clear that not only are the resources available to these agencies immense, but also that its ability to influence the lawmaking process is unequalled, given the "solid, consistent and usually unified support of the Jewish communities of the United States."[11] These communities are usually ready, willing and able to donate funds to the election campaigns of candidates who maintain a pro-

Israel stance, and to make phone calls or write letters to those Congressmen who have seemingly strayed off course.

Although most, if not all, of the activities of the Israel lobby are entirely legitimate under a democratic political system, the power of the lobby, and the lack of opponents possessing comparable resources, may result in a lack of discussion of other very feasible alternatives, regarding any particular issue in the Middle East. Thus, as stated by Senator Charles Mathias, when evaluating the desirability of having an overpowering Israel lobby, "a distinction must be drawn between ethnicity, which enriches American life and culture, and organized ethnic interest groups, which sometimes press causes that derogate from the national interest."[12]

Whether or not one accepts the notion, that to the most effective lobbyist should go the "spoils", one must admit that it is risky for elected government officials to ignore the wishes of the Israel lobby for very long. The risk is particularly high for those who represent a district with a substantial Jewish constituency, and for those who serve on important congressional committees, such as House Foreign Affairs or the House Appropriation's Foreign Operations Subcommittee. The political dangers associated with not maintaining a pro-Israel stance are the result of two factors. The first factor is the careful channeling of substantial pro-Israel PAC contributions to the opponents of those elected

officials who have "strayed" during their term in office, or to pro-Israel incumbents who face electoral challenges. Considering the amount of these contributions, which during the 1981-82 congressional election period totalled $1,873,623 and represented the largest total PAC contribution in the U.S., it is not outrageous to suggest that this lobby is able to directly influence the character of U.S. policy toward the Middle East and Israel.[13] The second factor is the high turnout of American Jews on election day, concentrated in the eight largest states. For example, in New York where Jews make up only 15 percent of the state's population, they constitute about 25 percent of the actual voters in any given election.[14] Because these big states are so important to presidential candidates, the interests of the Jewish community must be given preferential attention.

Other analysts argue that the influence of the Israel lobby on the American political process is even more pervasive. For example, Cheryl Rubenberg argues that the lobby has actually shaped public opinion and the political system over many years, and has created a favorable environment in which withdrawing support from Israel in any quantity is unthinkable. Consequently, "regardless of how severely American interests in the Middle East are compromised, the U.S. government will continue to provide Israel with complete support."[15] This conclusion is reinforced by Senator Mathias, who suggests that, even if the pro-Israel policy was not entirely the product of

the Israel lobby, it is clear that, "but for the efforts of American Jews, our military and economic aid to Israel would've been less than it is."[16]

Although a strong source of current trends in U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East seems to be the Israel lobby, it is the American government and its officials which must bear the responsibility for the ramifications of adopting a strong pro-Israel stance. The extent of these ramifications becomes painfully clear when one considers the conclusion of Alan R. Taylor that,

> Much of the Arab World's alienation from the United States stems directly from its predictably negative response to American favoritism for Israel. ...in categorizing Israel as a "special interest", the United States has helped to polarize the Arab world and to incite radicalism. Moreover, it has placed the moderate Arab states in a predicament, forcing them to diversify their foreign policies.[17]

Such favoritism for Israel has not only weakened the American position in the Arab world, but it has also made settling the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem much more difficult. This is because such favoritism simultaneously weakened the potential influence of the U.S., acting in the role of a mediator, while adding to Israel's confidence and eliminating the need for Israel to seek a negotiated peace with its remaining adversaries.

The longer the United States continues to pursue a Middle Eastern policy which is unbalanced, and which fails to resolve the underlying Palestinian problem, the more likely it is that

the conflict will get completely out of hand. Clearly, the Camp David Accords of the late 1970's have not ended Arab-Israeli fighting, as was demonstrated by the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, directed at PLO and Syrian forces in that country. Furthermore, although the accords did eliminate Egypt as an active participant in the conflict, there are signs in Egypt that this beneficial change may be short-lived, unless further steps are taken to bring both the Arab world and Israel to the negotiating table in the near future.

One of the reasons for Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem, in the name of peace, was his own feeling that the United States held all of the cards that his country needed for economic growth and development. He undoubtedly realized that his participation in a bilateral peace process would alienate Egypt from the rest of the Arab world. However, Sadat also believed that the loss of Arab support would be far outweighed by the benefits of ties with the United States and the West. Seven years later, despite extensive American aid, the economic development which Sadat had hoped for has not materialized. Most Egyptians are poorer now than in 1979. The country which was a food exporter only 10 years ago must now import half of its food at a cost of $10 million a day.[18] Tacked on to this economic drain are the subsidization programs used to hold down the prices for bread and other staple foods at a cost of $7 billion a year.[19]

As has occurred elsewhere in the Middle East, the economic and social problems, which have continued to grow under the leadership of President Hosni Mubarak, have fueled a resurgence of Islamic fervor. Although the number of religious activists is small, their calls for a return to Islamic principles, for a rejection of reliance on foreign powers, and for a recommitment by Egypt to militant struggle against Israel, have an attentive audience numbering in the millions.[20] Although the likelihood of an Iranian-type revolution occurring in Sunni Egypt is very slim, it is possible that the increasing pressure from the fundamentalists will affect the nature of Egypt's national policies. Possibly, this will result in a mere distancing by Egypt from open, blatant relations with the United States, or it may lead to a power change and a return, by Egypt, to the ranks of the Arab world.

It should be made clear that if there is an issue around which the Arab and non-Arab Islamic world can be united, it is the Palestinian issue. At the same time, because of historical, cultural, and domestic political factors that have combined to produce the "special relationship" with Israel, it is an issue with which the U.S. has dealt ineffectively. As a result of these facts, the Arab-Israeli conflict, if left uncontained and unresolved, presents a threat to the U.S. national interest in two ways. First, the lack of a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian problem will contribute greatly to a perpetual

state of regional instability. This regional instability will leave the U.S. national interest (secure Western access to a steady supply of Middle Eastern oil) in jeopardy, while threatening a "special" concern that the U.S. has for the survival of Israel. Second, the continuance of the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue to undermine U.S. influence in the region, and the U.S. ability to act successfully in defense of its national interest, should it come under attack. Given a pro-Israel U.S. policy in the Middle East, and the continuing inability of the U.S. to convince Israel that it should actively seek peace, it seems likely that anti-U.S. violence, the Soviet presence in the region, and the attractiveness of the Islamic fundamentalist doctrine will continue to increase.

This analysis is presented not to suggest that the United States can or should abandon ties with Israel. Rather, it calls for the striking of a happier medium between a concern for the health of the "special relationship" with Israel, and the national interest of the United States in the region. A suggestion as to how this can be more effectively accomplished is taken up in the final section. For the meantime, we turn our attention to the Soviet threat, and the manner by which superpower competition in the Middle East can, and does, threaten the U.S. national interest.

The Soviet Threat

When the Soviet Union embarked on a military invasion into neighboring Afghanistan in December of 1979, then President Jimmy Carter commented that the Soviet Union was, "...now attempting to consolidate a strategic position... that poses a grave threat to the movement of Middle East oil."[1] Despite President Carter's own self proclaimed ignorance about the "true" nature of Soviet foreign policy prior to the Afghanistan invasion, the potential threat of Soviet adventurism in the Middle East has, in fact, been of concern to U.S. foreign policy makers since the early 1950's. This concern has become increasingly intense over time, not only because of the increased importance of the region's primary resource, but also because of an increase in the Soviet Union's power projection capabilities, and in their apparent willingness to use them, if conditions are favorable.

Soviet foreign policy toward the Middle East has traditionally been directed by the more general tenets of Soviet foreign policy as a whole, at any particular point in time. Immediately following the conclusion of WWII, the Soviet Union was largely uninvolved in events in the Middle East, due to a strong and determined U.S. opposition which they encountered when they attempted to become involved. For

example, following the war, the Soviets refused to leave northern Iran, which had been occupied by Soviet and British troops during the war to secure a path for supplies headed to the Soviet Union. The Soviets denied the Iranian government access to the area, and, in the meantime, worked to strengthen the power of the local Communist party. This attempt at becoming active in the bordering territories of the Middle East reflected two general policies of the Soviet Union, emphasized in the Stalin period. First, a historical desire to bring territories bordering the Soviet Union under their control to improve Soviet territorial security. And, second, the stated role of the USSR as a world revolutionary power, and as the leader of the Communist movement.[2]

The policy, however, was not founded on a military capable of extending power far beyond Soviet borders. As a result, because of pressure from the United States and Iran's central government, the Soviets, after negotiating for the establishment of a joint-stock, Soviet-Iranian oil company, and for a certain degree of autonomy for the northern Iranian territory, peacefully withdrew.[3] The negotiated terms of the withdrawal were never enacted by Iran, however, and the Soviets remained peripheral to events in the region, for a time.

In the 1950's, Soviet policy took a turn following the death of Stalin and the rise to power of Nikita Kruschev.

Kruschev, who was viewed as an active diplomat, became personally involved with Soviet attempts at gaining new friends and allies. Furthermore, the qualifications for beginning a friendly relationship with the Soviet Union were loosened through a redefinition of Leninism. This redefinition put emphasis on the need for Soviet support of anti-Western nationalist movements, which were to aid socialism in its fight against the capitalist forces, in addition to continued support for the world's Communist forces.[4]

These changes in Soviet foreign policy fit well with the changes that had occurred in the Third World, and more particularly the Middle East, during the period of decolonization. And, as pointed out by Adeed Dawisha,

> Though having interests in the area which were no less "imperialistic" than those of the U.S., Britain or France, the Soviet Union was perceived at the popular level as a friendly and supportive power, simply because it was backing the indigenous "nationalist" forces.[5]

This positive view of the Soviet Union at the popular level, combined with the anti-Western attitude of the nationalist movements, which had developed out of the West's historical involvement in the region, greatly aided the rapid growth of Soviet influence in the Middle East beginning in the 1950's.

While it was the regional changes, and the region's negative view of the West which provided the open door for the Soviets, it was their own desire to compete for status in

a region with close proximity, high value, and a lack of U.S. dominance, which made the growth of Soviet influence a reality. The primary method used for gaining such influence and credibility in the Middle East during this period was arms sales. The first Soviet "successes" using arms sales as the bait were Syria, and, more importantly, Egypt. In the case of Egypt, the Soviets exploited Egyptian opposition to the Western sponsored Baghdad pact, which later took the name CENTO. The pact, between Great Britain, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq, was formed to counter increased Soviet involvement in the region. However, it actually provided an opening to Egypt for the Soviets, who provided an alternative source of weapons, particularly following the Israeli-British-French invasion of Egypt in 1956.[6]

The sale of modern weaponry to the Arab world greatly improved the image of the Soviet Union during the 1950's, while it also increased the military power and the stature of her clients in the Middle East. By the early 1960's, the Soviet Union's influence had become established in three of the region's most important states: Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Furthermore, Soviet influence had begun to take hold in Yemen and Algeria, and the overwhelming wave of Arab nationalism was causing turbulence in two Arab states which could be loosely termed "Western assets": Saudi Arabia and Jordan.[7]

The Soviet position grew even stronger in the late

1960's, especially in Egypt, following that nation's poor showing in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. After the war, the Soviets provided a much needed resupply of weapons, and economic support, upon which Egypt soon became dependent. In return for such aid, the Soviets were granted the use of naval and air facilities, which marked a high point for the Soviet Union's presence in the region.[8] Subsequently, just as quickly as Soviet influence had risen, it went into a rapid and sudden decline.

The 1970's was a decade in which both superpowers would learn a very poignant lesson; namely, that arms sales and economic interaction do not buy permanent alliances, nor control over the policies of the nations of the Middle East. For the Soviets, the change in the leadership of Egypt following Nasser's death in 1970 brought with it a change in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. Although a Soviet-Egyptian treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed in May of 1971, Sadat soon took action to alter the relationship after his requests for increased arms sales and economic commitments went largely unfulfilled. In July of 1972, Sadat announced that Soviet military personnel, numbering between 15 and 20 thousand, were being expelled, and that, of the extensive Soviet military presence, only their use of naval facilities would remain largely as it was before.[9] Even when the Soviets risked their newly formed detente relationship

with Washington in order to back Syria and Egypt in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Sadat continued to criticize the Soviets, and searched for a way to open up relations with the United States. Finally, in March of 1976, Egypt unilaterally terminated the treaty signed just 5 years earlier, and announced the end of Soviet access to their naval facilities.[10]

The Soviet position in the Middle East was deteriorated evem further by events in "pro-Soviet" Iraq. During 1978 and 1979, a total of forty-eight members of the Iraqi Communist Party were executed for attempting to establish a communist organization within the armed forces.[11] Although economic ties remain extensive, Iraq has continued to look to the West for its technology and equipment. Furthermore, as in Egypt, it is clear that this continuing economic interaction, and the 1972 treaty of friendship and cooperation between Iraq and the Soviet Union, have not given the Soviets the political influence which they had sought. And, given the Soviet's uncommited stance regarding the Iran-Iraq War, this relationship will most likely continue to wane.

Currently, some 30 years after the inception of serious Soviet activity in the region, the Soviet Union's position in the Middle East has improved somewhat. Clearly, however, the Soviet Union's ability to retain the gains which remain, or to build a larger presence in the future, is dependent on

factors outside of its control. These factors are very similar to those with which the United States must deal, including Islamic fundamentalism, an anti-superpower attitude in the region, regional cleavages among Arab states such as Iran and Iraq, and the burden of the history of Soviet failures.

The stymieing nature of these factors is visible even within the remaining Soviet "client states", which by 1980 amounted to a grand total of three nations: Syria, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), and Libya. Libya and Syria are both vehemently Islamic nations, which hardly puts them on the same ideological plane with the Soviet Union. As a result, the Soviet relationship with these two countries is precarious at best, having been founded on the current need that these countries have for Soviet military hardware, which can be used to bolster the power of their leaders in the region and their ability to maintain domestic control. The only Arab state, which is more than "a transient and unreliable ally" of the Soviet Union in the Middle East is the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a nation which just happens to be the poorest of them all.[12]

Given that Soviet influence in the region has declined in recent years after a period of growth immediately following World War II, one may ask whether it is possible for the

Soviet Union to threaten the U.S. national interest. And, if it is possible, whether the Soviet Union has any reason to challenge the United States position in the Middle East. Although it may appear to be otherwise at first glance, the answer to each of these questions is a resounding yes. While the Soviets do not have the military might and influence needed to take control of the Middle East, they do have sufficient power to undermine any effort by the U.S. to create an environment favorable to itself and the security of the U.S. national interest. Also, the Soviet Union understands the strategic value of the Middle East, as does the United States. This draws both of them toward a policy of competition and active participation in regional developments.

Clearly, the Soviet Union has achieved superpower status in the late 20th Century, giving it the capability to endanger the U.S. national interest in a variety of ways. The first method which the Soviets could employ is that of a direct attack on the Gulf. Such an attack could be a full-fledged military invasion, or a very limited attack on the concentrated oil fields of the Gulf. Whatever the scenario or series of events, which could be envisioned to include such a disastrous end, two things are clear. First, in any superpower conflict in the Middle East, the Soviet Union has the advantage of proximity, despite the fact that "it is an

advantage which diminishes quite rapidly with distance from the Soviet Union."[13] Secondly, the potential damage which the Soviet Union could inflict directly on the nations of the Middle East, and indirectly on the Western economy, with such an attack is immense. Despite these realities, it seems highly unlikely that the Soviet Union would risk the staging of a direct attack on the Gulf areas. Although an attack on a bordering country such as that staged against Afghanistan in 1979 is slightly less unlikely, it would still require a set of unusual circumstances which create a unique opportunity for the Soviets.

A second method which the Soviet Union could use to undermine the U.S. position and its national interest in the region is that of an indirect attack, through the manipulation or support of the actions of regional clients.[14] Feasibly, this could involve an attack by the Soviet supported forces of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen on neighboring North Yemen, Oman, or Saudi Arabia. Or, it could involve the delivery of military and economic aid to the Arab participants in the Arab-Israeli conflict, allowing Syria and the PLO to continue their struggle against Israel and the U.S. with dangerously destabilizing fervor. This method, unlike the preceding one, is likely to be utilized by the Soviet Union - very probably with a good deal of success. As discussed earlier, only a resolution of the

Arab-Israeli conflict will diminish the effectiveness of this method, and slam the door on the Soviet's desire to gain wider access to the strategic Persian Gulf.

A third, and final method that could be utilized by the Soviet Union is the instigation or encouragement of internal revolt in the weaker nations of the Middle East. This may be accomplished through a process of befriending indigenous communist parties, pro-Soviet leftists, or anti-Western nationalists, and preparing them for leadership should an opportunity arise.[15] This method is unlikely to be successful in the large number of nations in the Middle East, where Islamic fundamentalism is becoming a dominant force. In these nations, the pro-Soviet communist parties are ruthlessly suppressed, and new secular leaders are unwelcome.

Thus, it appears that the Soviets have at least one potentially effective method currently at their disposal. The other two methods may become feasible should a change occur in certain factors beyond their control, including U.S. foreign policy. Whether or not the Soviets utilize the method of indirect attack does depend on them, however, and their perception of what there is to be gained by actively participating in the region's events, or to lose by not participating at all.

There are several factors which draw the Soviets toward active participation. The first of which is a desire to

achieve and maintain their superpower status relative to the U.S., through competition for influence. Secondly, the Soviets are drawn into participation because, "by simple reason of its geographical proximity, the Middle East has long been a region vital to Soviet security."[16] And thirdly, as Soviet oil production declines in the next two decades, and as they continue to look to sell more oil to the West in return for hard currency, the Soviet bloc will require supplementary oil from the Middle East to satisfy the energy requirements of Eastern Europe.[17] All of these forces suggest that the Soviet Union will continue to try to fully exercise the capabilities at its disposal. The Soviets will do so not necessarily with the expectation of achieving rapid growth in their influence, which seems unrealistic given recent Soviet experiences, but rather with the intention of limiting American influence by undermining the region's stability.

Thus, the potential threat to the U.S. national interest posed by the Soviet Union is very real. The Soviets have built their power projection capabilities, particularly their naval forces, up to a level from which they can challenge the U.S. position in the Middle East. They are aided in their challenge by the fact that they have very little left to lose, and a lot to gain from making their presence felt. Furthermore, the ever changing course of events in the Middle

East gives the non-status quo Soviet Union a second advantage relative to the U.S.; since the U.S. has as a main objective, the maintenance of stability.

Whether or not the potential of the Soviet threat will be realized depends largely on how carefully American foreign policy is directed toward containing it. It seems that, up to this point, U.S. favoritism for Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict has aided the Soviets, and has increased the likelihood of a potentially disastrous direct superpower conflict. The manner in which the Soviet threat can be more effectively contained, as well as the manner in which the Arab-Israeli conflict and Islamic fundamentalism can be ended or coped with, is taken up in the final section of this treatise.

Reforming American Foreign Policy

As the United States emerged from the Vietnam War in the 1970's, there was a realization that one of the most fundamental threats to the U.S. national interest around the world is a U.S. foreign policy based on faulty assumptions, improper weighting of regional concerns relative to one another, and a lack of understanding with regard to the nature or root causes of events there. In order to tie the preceding analysis together, this section will examine the various instruments or methods that the U.S. can utilize to eliminate, or reduce, the dangers associated with the spoke concerns: Islamic fundamentalism, the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict, and superpower competition which results from a growth in the Soviet presence in the Middle East.

One of the root causes of the United States' failure to eliminate, or reduce, these dangers has been the inability of U.S. foreign policy makers to effectively distinguish between the various concerns that they have in the Middle East.[1] As argued previously, this must be done in such a way that the most fundamental concerns are protected, and rarely, if ever, jeopardized for the sake of less fundamental concerns. Such a failure to distinguish between concerns is apparent when one considers the United States' unquestioning support for Israel.

There are those who argue that "America's highest national interest is preservation of what gives it its own sense of self-worth -- religious liberty, democratic institutions, moral character, and western culture."[2] Since these values are embodied in Israel, rather than the Arab world, they argue that America's "highest national interest" in the Middle East is the protection and furthering of the state of Israel. Others argue that America's "highest national interest" lies in Israel because, "peace, stability and security in the Middle East can be preserved by a strong Israel receiving U.S. arms and economic assistance."[3]

Both of these arguments lack a critical foundation in reality, however. First, favoritism for Israel has made the Arab world much more susceptible to Soviet influence. Secondly, it has contributed to the strengthening of the Islamic fundamentalists, and to an increase in the likelihood that American lives and interests will be endangered. Furthermore, although, on the hierarchy of interests spoken of earlier, it may be that the U.S. has a "high" concern about preserving its own feeling of self-worth, it is obvious that this concern can never be satisfied unless the foundation, upon which U.S. power rests, is strong. Thus, if the West has a lower than adequate supply of oil, its economy, and in turn the national strength and the fulfillment of the "higher" goals of the United States, will

suffer.

Although it is true that the United States and Israel do have many things in common, and that the "special relationship" is often mutually beneficial, this should not be taken as proof that Israel's national interests are entirely compatible with the U.S. national interest in the region. Clearly, such complete compatibility does not exist. For example, despite a U.S. desire to peacefully resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel has continued to exacerbate it by continuing support for Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, and by formally annexing the Golan Heights in 1981 in violation of the spirit of Security Council Resolution 242. Among other things, the resolution calls for the withdrawal of Israel from these territories, occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Similarly, despite a U.S. concern about the maintenance of stability and peace in the Middle East, Israel launched an air strike on an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, a "pre-emptive" invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and an air raid on the PLO's headquarters in the capital of Tunisia in 1985. This last raid was aided by information in thousands of classified U.S. documents obtained by Israel through the spying of Jonathan Jay Pollard, a former U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, on their behalf.[4] Finally, whereas the U.S. must be concerned about achieving a military balance in the region which deters risk

taking and encourages a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel has shown that it "will do whatever its leaders regard as necessary for security."[5]

In spite of these Israeli actions which have put the U.S. national interest in jeopardy repeatedly, U.S. criticism of Israel has been extraordinarily mild; and massive U.S. aid totalling more than $3.6 billion in 1986, continues to flow freely. As suggested by William Quandt, a former member of the National Security Council during the Carter Administration, "the Israeli tail sometimes wags the American dog in the tight relationship."[6] The dangers associated with allowing Israel to make decisions for the United States are immense, however. As Hans Morgenthau warns

> Strong nations...lose their freedom of action by identifying their own national interests with those of a weak ally. Secure in the support of its powerful friend, the weak ally can choose the objectives and methods of its foreign policy to suit itself. The powerful nation then finds it must support interests...that are not vital to itself, but only to its ally.[7]

As stated earlier, this critique is not intended to suggest that the United States should end its "special relationship" with Israel. Rather, what is called for is a "normal relationship" which takes into account domestic political realities, as a constraint instead of a determinant of policy, and balances them with international political and economic necessities. It should be a relationship which can endure corrective criticism, similar to that which is

routinely traded between the U.S., Western Europe and Japan, which has been rare in coming from the United States under the "special relationship". This criticism should in no way demand compliance to the wishes of the party giving it, nor should it be accompanied by pointless threats. However, it should be given, as warranted, in a way such that the U.S. stance in the Middle East, at the least, takes on an aura of being less one-sided. Such a return to a more balanced policy in the Middle East may ultimately restore U.S. credibility as a mediator of the persistent Arab-Israeli conflict, making a resolution of it much more likely than it is at present.

The establishment of such a "normal relationship" with Israel, and the creation of an American foreign policy that is truly capable of protecting the U.S. national interest, requires a definite understanding of why the U.S. is committed to the survival of Israel. Clearly, the basis is a shared cultural affinity and shared values, "rooted in strong emotions, Biblical and historical, galvanized by feelings of guilt and obligation arising from the Holocaust."[8]

The commitment is not, on the other hand, the result of an Israeli capability to successfully act as a protectorate of the entire region, against Soviet infiltration or attack, Islamic fundamentalism, or Arab radicals, a capability which simply does not exist. Nor is it because the two countries

share a total commonality of national interests in the region. It is open to doubt, for example, that Israel would willingly respond to an attack by Iran or South Yemen on Saudi Arabian oil fields, even if such a response was requested by the U.S. or the other members of the Western alliance.

With the true basis of the U.S. commitment to the survival of Israel in mind, U.S. foreign policy can again be more correctly directed toward defining its own national interest, and toward defending it with the instruments that are actually at the United States disposal. Primarily, the U.S. must concentrate on defusing the Palestinian problem with peaceful means, based on the realization that it is a rallying point for radical forces, and is constantly exploited by the Soviet Union for its own purposes. While the specifics of a solution to this long-lasting conflict are well beyond the scope of this discussion, it is clear that in order for a successful compromise settlement to be reached, the United States must remain committed to seeking peace, and to earning the trust of the Arab world as a potential mediator of the conflict.

Whether or not a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is eventually achieved, it seems likely that the U.S. will continue to be challenged by the Soviet Union in the Middle East; although such a solution would significantly reduce the

possibility of a direct superpower conflict. On numerous occasions during the early 1980's, Soviet authorities expressed a desire to gain "more even handed access to Middle East oil supplies...enabling them to reduce production investment, postpone reform, spend more on defense - a number of options the West might prefer to deny them."[9] Presumably, if the Soviets are able to obtain access to Middle Eastern oil, they will also keep the depletion rate of their own resources steady, while hastening the rate at which the energy pool of the industrialized West is depleted.

Under current market conditions, the Soviets have an even better reason to go in search of greater access to the region's oil. With the price of oil at a low level, relative to the early 1980's, the Soviets must sell a greater quantity of oil on the market to earn the same amount of hard currency. This point becomes particularly clear when one considers the proportion of hard currency earnings normally generated by the sale of petroleum, totalling over 56 percent in 1979.[10] In order to fill the gap created by a stable level of oil consumption and a decrease in the quantity of oil available for domestic consumption, as a result of an increase in the quantity of Soviet oil sold on the world market, either an outside source of energy must be tapped, or more Soviet oil must be produced (or as a last resort consumption must be decreased). Ironically however, in order

for the Soviets to produce more oil, they need technology from the West which is only available to purchasers with hard currency. Clearly, something's got to give.

Recalling the dangers associated with having the Soviet Union merely competing for influence in the Middle East, it seems obvious that the U.S. has good reason to be extremely concerned about the potential dangers associated with having the Soviet Union competing for access to oil. Before extensive superpower competition develops over the region's primary resource, it may be that the best policy for the West to pursue is one which raises "the costs of Soviet operations in the area while simultaneously...helping the USSR to lower the costs of developing its own energy sources."[11] This, of course, is easier said than done.

President Carter's declaration in 1980, that any hostile effort undertaken with the purpose of controlling the Gulf would be repelled with any means necessary, including military force, has been carried over into the Reagan administration's policies; however, the stated policy has not solved the long-standing problem of how to bring U.S. power to bear in the region. One requirement for a successful military action in the Middle East, in defense of the U.S. national interest, is that of assistance from friendly states. The importance of this requirement is clear when one considers the supply lines of U.S. troops in the Middle East,

which stretch half way around the world, in comparison to the relatively short, land-based supply lines of the Soviet Union. The assistance from friendly states can include secure rights to the use of national facilities, the support of indigenous military forces, and the coordination of contingency planning and military training exercises. Unfortunately, as of 1985, almost all of the states cooperating in at least one of these ways (Kenya, Somalia, Turkey, Oman, and Egypt), with the exception of Oman, were distant from the region's primary oil fields.[12] Thus, it appears that, given the relative weakness of the oil-rich Gulf states, and the lack of pre-established U.S. military bases in the Persian Gulf, the U.S. would probably have to go it alone in the event of a direct Soviet attack.

Considering the uncertainty which surrounds the effectiveness of U.S. military forces in the Middle Eastern theatre of war, it seems that a goal of U.S. foreign policy is to create an environment in the region that does not require the introduction of U.S. forces for active combat against the Soviets. One way of doing this is through the creation of an aura of American military power in the Middle East. Although the U.S. may actually be incapable of taking on the Soviets in a protracted Middle Eastern conflict, the appearance of tangible military strength, such as a highly visible naval force and visible investment in the special

forces, may be enough to deter direct superpower confrontation.[13] Also, the United States retains the last resort force of nuclear weapons, which can also act as a deterrent to Soviet aggression wherever U.S. interests are explicit.

Dealing with indigenous radical Arabs, who may or may not receive support from the Soviet Union, and Islamic fundamentalist leaders, is a much greater challenge for the United States. The likelihood of destabilizing events transpiring as a result of these individuals or groups is much higher. Also U.S. military force is not applicable to the prevention of terrorist truck bombings, or assassination attempts waged against moderate Arab leaders in the region. The U.S. must largely rely on the capabilities of each government with which it has friendly relations, to successfully contain dissent through a "smart" domestic policy, rather than brut force. Fortunately, it appears that the most important Arab state to the U.S., Saudi Arabia, has a ruling family that is more prudent than was the Shah of Iran.

Clearly the moderate leaders of the Middle East must be discouraged from acting as though their nation's existed in a vacuum, free from the effects of Islamic fundamentalism and entirely distinct from the other Arab nations. As the former leaders of Iran and Egypt discovered, a lack of concern about

public sentiment can be extremely dangerous. In order to protect the surviving moderate leaders, or to aid them in protecting themselves and their nations, the U.S. must continue to heighten its own awareness of the domestic and political constraints under which the leaders of the Middle East must operate. And then, the U.S. should conduct its own policy accordingly, realizing that "attacks are not aimed at a specific people, but at a policy in general."[14]

Such realizations by U.S. foreign policy makers should finally cause a change in the U.S. relationship with the nations of the Middle East. The U.S. would be wise to play down, publicly, the relationship that it has with vital nations in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, until it can improve its standing in the Middle East. To improve its standing in the Arab world, the U.S. must intensify its effort to solve the underlying Arab-Israeli conflict, which has plagued the U.S. position in the region, and has exacerbated the threats presented by the Soviet presence and Islamic fundamentalism. In order to do this, the U.S. must take a more balanced stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict, while remaining committed to the survival of Israel. And finally, the U.S. must begin redefining the often faulty assumptions upon which its foreign policy has been based during the last 20 years.

As we have seen, the United States national interest in

the Middle East is Western access to a secure and steady supply of oil, which is the lifeline of the Western economy, its industries, and its military apparatus. While the United States has other concerns in the region, none is as primary as the concern over Middle Eastern oil. Despite wishful thinking regarding U.S. oil import dependency, it appears that it is once again on the rise. Furthermore, Western reliance on the region's oil is likely to increase even more drastically as the West's oil wells begin to run dry. As this occurs, the U.S. national interest in the Middle East will become even more paramount. Only through a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian problem, and a subsequent effort to contain Soviet influence and Islamic fundamentalism, can Western dependence be made bearable.

NOTES

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